

Federal Column

Here's a Chance to Hit The Financial Jackpot

By John Cramer

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Today I offer — absolutely free — a chance for literally thousands of federal employees and former employees to hit the financial jackpot. And to the tune of hundreds of dollars if they're lucky.

Mark down B-183086.

That's the number of a Comptroller General's decision of Dec. 5, 1975.

It said that federal employees detailed to higher-grade jobs for more than 120 days without advance approval by Civil Service Commission are entitled to temporary promotions for all detail time in excess of 120 days.

NOW MARK down B-184990, which comes out Feb. 20.

That one, the CG officially ruled, employees whose past details established rights to temporary promotions may be granted them retroactively — provided they file claims within six years after the details ended.

By civil service rules, on which the CG's decisions were based, agencies may act on their own to detail employees to higher grade jobs for periods up to 120 days. But longer details require advance approval by CSC.

These rules, however, were widely ignored — and repeatedly violated — prior to the Dec. 5 decision.

And as a result, innumerable employees illegally were detailed for more than 120 days. Over the last six years alone, the total almost certainly runs to many thousands, including — if I may offer a guess out of long experience — at least several thousand in the D.C. area.

Precisely how many will be able to prove illegal details is a different matter.

In many cases, official files may be missing. Part of the longtime general pattern of violation of rules was the failure of many agencies to record details in employee personnel

ON THE OTHER hand, in some cases it may be possible — emphasize *may* — to prove claims even in the absence of official files.

Meanwhile, some employees already are cashing in. Look, please, at four cases recently decided by the comptroller:

- Melvin L. Rutt, a Federal Aviation Administration employee, was illegally detailed in 1973 from a GS-14 to a GS-15 for seven months. The CG ordered a retroactive promotion starting with the 121st day of the detail. Rutt will get a check for \$504.88.
- Marlin W. Williams, a guard at the Naval Surface Weapons Center at White Oak, was detailed from a GS-6 guard job to a GS-7 guard chief job from Dec. 4, 1972 to Feb. 3, 1974. He'll get \$714.01.
- Vincent A. Mariner, a GS-14 computer systems analyst in the U.S. International Trade Commission, was detailed to a GS-15 acting division chief job from Sept. 30, 1974 to Jan. 15, 1976. He'll get \$955.20.
- Marie Grant, a GS-4 accounting technician at Kelly Air Force Base, Texas, was detailed to a GS-5 job from July 1, 1970 until July 16, 1971. Her case brought the B-184990 decision.

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And here again the CG awarded a retroactive temporary promotion starting with the 121st day. He did not, however, spell out the precise amount she'll receive.

IF YOU THINK you have a claim based on an illegal detail, here's what you should do:

- Obtain copies of the two cited comptroller's decisions by calling 275-5028. They will help tell you whether you are, indeed, eligible for that back pay.

Get the name of the personnel director of your agency.

Present your claim, including the citations, in writing to him, retaining a copy for your own files.

Work through a union if you're a member or entitled to union representation.

If your claim is solidly documented or otherwise verifiable, don't take "no" as an answer from your agency.

If the agency turns you down, refile your claim with the Claims Division of the General Accounting Office.

As for agencies, they have authority, under the comptroller's rulings, to grant retroactive temporary promotions on their own when and if they verify claims.

When questions arise, they should refer them to the Claims Division.

Jackpot anyone?

Almost as much fun as instant lottery.

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